The Last Breath

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ERKAM YAYINLARI

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TRANSLATOR`S INTRODUCTION

Our every breath consists of an exhalation and an inhalation, each succeeding the other without pause. This process occurs naturally and most often without any consciousness on our part. Every breath is essential to our continuation; with each one our life is prolonged. Yet one day this will stop; at that time, at the moment of our final breath, what will be the state of our hearts?

In this elegantly written book, Ustadh Osman Nuri Topbas provides us with an important reminder of the necessity of preparing for death. Every living creature will die, even the most dogmatic sceptic will concede this. Yet not every creature will have spent its life in preparation for the final moment, for its final breath. The author tells us of the need to discipline ourselves so that we can attain sound and spiritually refined hearts, ready to confront our fates in as perfect a manner as possible. We must aim for a state of spiritual perfection during the course of our lives with the hope that this will be our condition when we breathe our last.

Ustadh Osman Nuri Topbas presents us with enlightening parables, stories and wisdoms which we can implement in our lives. Warning us against complacency and indecisiveness, he gives illustrations from the lives of those who struggled to maintain their faith, those who capitulated to their carnal desires with the result that they fell from grace.

We read how we can work towards achieving the objective of dying as righteous worshippers, and how this is only possible through loving Allah Almighty. We only hurt ourselves by forgetting Him. We can control our actions, desires and behaviour through His remembrance.

With fine detail, we are advised on how to improve our condition in this life in preparation for our final breath and the Hereafter. With deeds of excellence, acts of piety, and hearts full of the love of Allah Almighty, we can change our fear of death into a longing for it.

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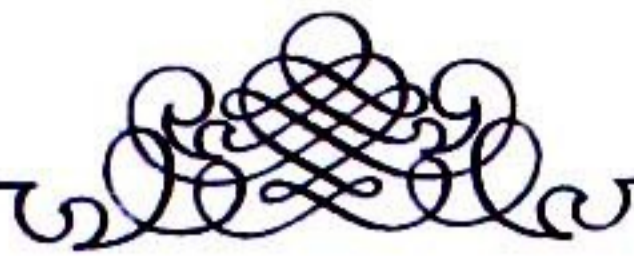
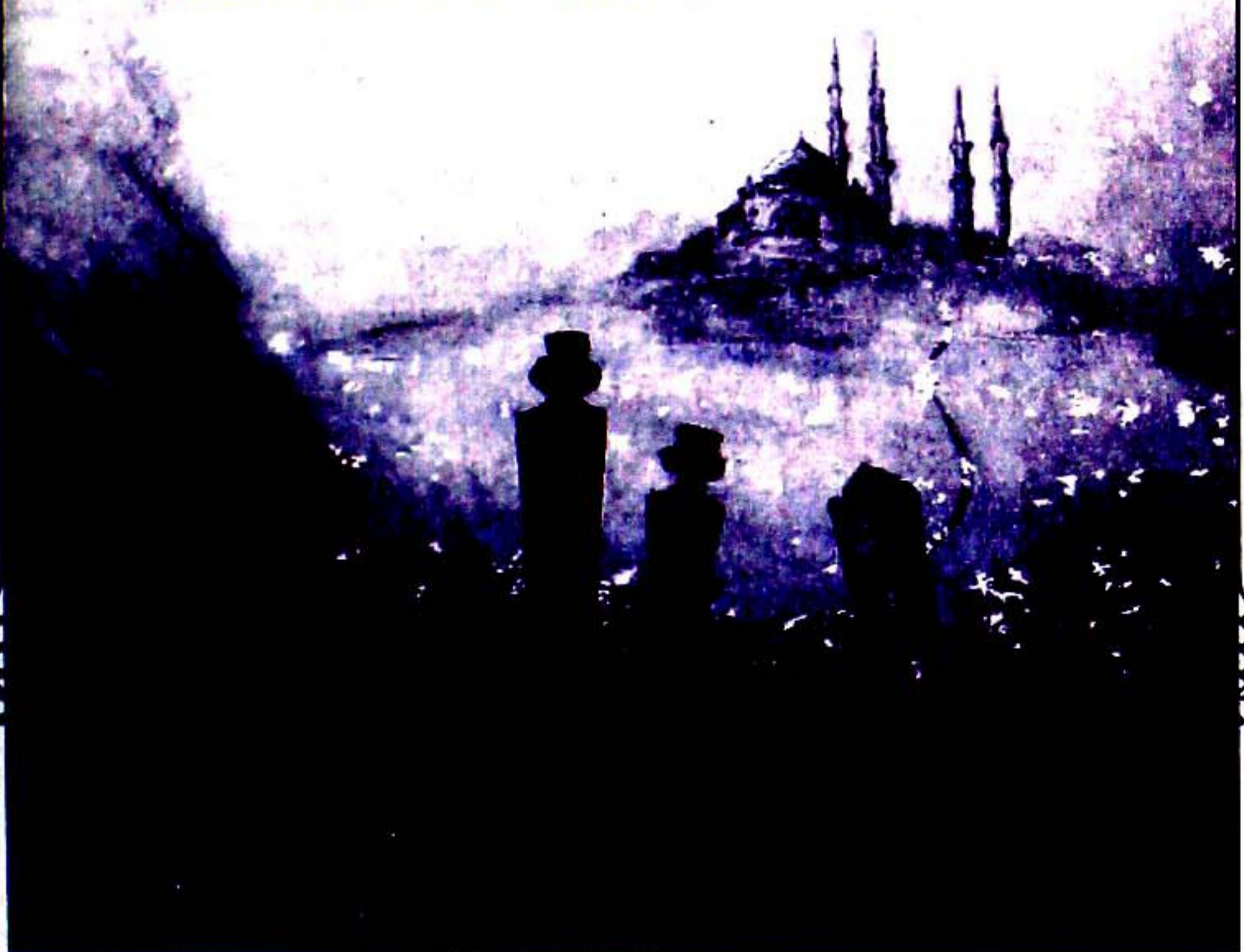

Prepare For Your Last Breath

From the time of our birth until we die we continue along the road without realizing it. With every moment in time we draw that much closer to our end.

Prepare For Your Last Breath

Allah Almighty has assigned the attribute of eternity for Himself alone. It is for this reason that all that exists, save for His Supreme Essence, is mortal. In fact, Allah says:

"All that is on earth will perish." (Rahmân, 55: 26)

The manifestation of this will be actualized by death:

"Every soul shall have a taste of death..." (Anbiyâ, 21: 35)

Human beings, therefore, should live in contemplation of this reality. Furthermore, Allah says in the Qur'ân:

"And the stupor of death comes in truth, 'This was the thing which thou wast trying to escape!'" (Qâf, 50: 19)

Since human beings have been put in this world to be tried, their greatest objective should be to strive to attain a place in heaven, the home of peace and elation, by gaining the pleasure of Allah. The only way to achieve this is to attain the state described in the verse:

"The day whereon neither wealth nor sons will avail. But only he (will prosper) that brings to Allah a sound heart." (Shu'arâ, 26: 88-89)

Such is only possible by disciplining the soul; and the true discipline of the human soul is submission, commitment and obedience to Allah and His Messenger Prophet Muhammad (May Allah bless him and grant him peace). In reference to the Prophet, this requires one to take lessons from his twenty three-year long prophetic life, that is, from his spiritual life. Allah Almighty revealed the Holy Qur'ân through the Archangel Jibrîl directly to the heart of the Prophet Muhammad. Thus, in some way, all of the Prophet's worship, sayings, manners and actions are interpretations of the Qur'ân. Within the framework of this reality, it is essential for us to love the

Prophet Muhammad (May Allah bless him and grant him peace) more than we love our own lives, belongings, families and all else if we are to benefit fully from his spiritual life. His love moulds the slave in the love of Allah. In other words, loving him means loving Allah and vice versa. For the ultimate union with Allah, one's heart needs to achieve the highest level of love.

The aforementioned are the greatest steps in preparation for our last breath. This means that the results yielded by our final breath are contingent upon the earlier breaths we have taken. Preparation for the last breath begins immediately, since it will only be as good as the breaths we take at the moment. Allah's servants of distinction, who live throughout their lives with love and devotion to the Almighty and His Messenger, peacefully breathe their last by pronouncing the testimony of faith (*shahâdah*). They are the ones about whom the Prophet Muhammad gave glad tidings: *"He who (sincerely) testifies that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is the messenger of Allah*

while taking his last breath will enter Paradise..." (Hâkim, *Mustadrak*, vol. I, no. 503)

In other words, whoever lives throughout his lifetime with the *kalima-i tawhîd*[1] will breath his last on his journey towards Allah with it on his lips. Such are the ones who have wiped all temporary and worldly loves and idols out of their hearts by saying *lâ* (there is no) and then filled them with the love of Allah Almighty by the pronouncement *illâ* (but).

It is essential to know that the universe which has been created by the power of the Almighty is a transitory dwelling decorated with many attractions. Nothing in the world was created without a cause. The objective of human beings in this world is to attain happiness in the Hereafter. That is why our Lord warns us, the believers: *"O, ye who believe! Fear Allah as He should be feared and die not except in a state of Islam."* (Âl 'Imrân, 3: 102)

Death, which sooner or later every living being on earth will face, is

1. The *"kalmia-l tawhîd"* is the Muslim testimony of faith, *"lâ ilâha illallâh muhammad rasûlulla."*

tantamount to a personal judgment day. We should never forget that we, whether we realize it or not, are actually confronted by death several times every day and night. Death ever waits in ambush for us. Imâm Jalâluddîn Rûmî says in his *Mathnawî*:

"Every moment a part of you is perishing... At every moment you are relinquishing a part of your life."

With every passing day, do we not move a step away from this mortal life and move a step closer to the grave? Are the days not being torn away from our life's calendar? As though we stand blind against the current of a river, Rûmî warns us:

"O people, take your last glimpse at the embroidery in the mirror! And think how this beauty will be when it grows old and how a building looks in ruins and do not be misled by the lie in the mirror."

Our last breath is a divine secret that is surrounded by innumerable wisdoms. When "death-the most certain" of future realities-will meet us rests on divine fate.

As a matter of fact, humans confront the possibility of death each day of their lives. Illnesses, unexpected events and disasters are all realities they face, but most people due to their weaknesses are unaware of these everyday dangers. Does this not show how fine the line is between this world and the next?

Therefore, human beings should contemplate the meanings of the above-mentioned verses and live in accordance with them at all times; they must think before time runs out since there will be no second chance in the Hereafter. Though human beings should be aware of this reality, many remain heedless, wasting their time; the majority of human beings simply watch the passing of days in numbness, like rocks which never receive their share from the drops of falling rain...

In fact, from the time of our birth until we die we continue along the road without realizing it. With every moment in time we draw that much closer to our end. This is beautifully explained in the following verse:

"O people, take your last glimpse at
the embroidery in the mirror!
And think how this beauty will
be when it grows old and how a
building looks in ruins and do not
be misled by the lie in the mirror."

Rūmi

"If We grant long life to any, We cause him to be reversed in nature: Will they not then understand?" (Yâsîn, 36: 68)

In the market of Ukaz, Kus bin Sâ'idah, a pious man who lived before the time of Prophet Muhammad (May Allah bless him and grant him peace) and had given his people glad tidings of his arrival, once made a speech which, in retrospection, is like an interpretation of the verse above. He described the scenes of this mortal life in the following beautiful manner:

"O people! Come, listen and take warning! Every living creature will die, whoever is dead will perish, rain falls and grass grows. Children are born and take the place of their parents. Then all will fade and perish. It is a chain of events, all following one after the other..."

Once our lives are spent and we breathe our last we will either find ourselves with time to bid farewell to all that is in the world or out of time. But for those who are truly devoted to and in love with Allah, it will not be death *per se*; rather, it will be a blessed resurrection, and they

will be brought forth as if on *Shab-i Arûs*, the wedding night. This is why we must understand the secret of the expression "*die before death comes to you*". This secret is explained in the words of Rûmî as: "*Die to be resurrected*".

'Alî (May Allah be pleased with him) once said "*Humans are asleep and when they die they wake up...*" Therefore, we must know that true life is not to live as a bestial soul, but rather to live in accordance with our divine souls that have been blessed by Allah Almighty, and not being defeated by our emotions or worldly desires.

The worst kind of death is to die unaware of Allah Almighty, bereft of His pleasure. This is why a believer must be conscious of how they live and how they will die; they must train themselves to turn their belief (*imân*) into perfection in faith (*ihsân*). Nobody, aside from the Prophets, has been given a guarantee about how they will die or be resurrected, yet in the following verse where the Prophet Yûsuf (upon him be peace) seeks refuge in Allah, there is a significant message for us:

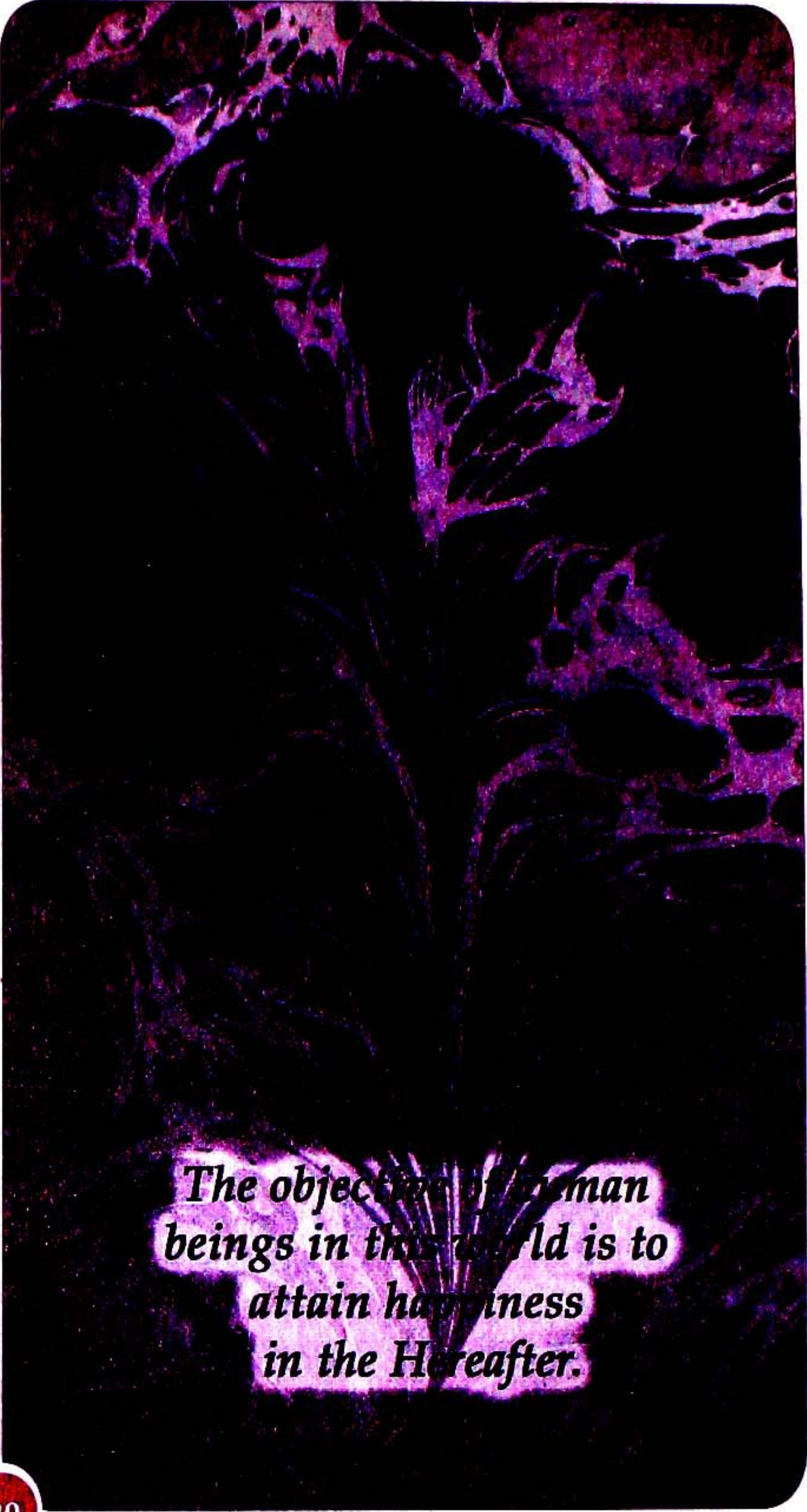
"Originator of the heavens and the earth! Thou art near unto me in this world and in the life to come: let me die as one who has surrendered himself unto Thee, and make me one with the righteous!"." (Yûsuf, 12: 101)

Thus, the hearts of believers must be in a state that is between fear and hope. With this cautiousness and tender-heartedness, a person should always spend his life being concerned with taking his final breath with faith.

The first and clearest indication of our state on the Day of Judgment manifests itself in the way in which we breathe for the last time in this world. The Qur'ân, our guide to salvation, gives us several examples of the faithful on their deathbeds-faithful who had striven for eternal salvation-depicting the rewards they received. Subsequent to Prophet Mûsâ performing an incontrovertible miracle, the magicians of Pharaoh said:

"We believe in the Lord of the Worlds, the Lord of Mûsâ and Hârûn." (A'râf, 7: 121-22) They immediately prostrated

and were blessed with faith. But the imprudent Pharaoh became infuriated and considered himself capable of governing their souls with his power; he threatened them saying:

"*...Believe ye in him before I give you permission? Surely this is a trick which ye have planned in the city to drive out its people: but soon shall ye know (the consequences). Be sure I will cut off your hands and your feet on opposite sides, and I will cause you all to die on the cross.*" (A'râf, 7: 123-24)

The magicians, in a deep ecstasy of faith, replied:

"*...we are but sent back unto our Lord!*" (A'râf, 7: 125)

With the power of faith they stood against Pharaoh.

How exemplary their narrative is: even when they faced the oppression of Pharaoh, they did not ask to be saved from it, but rather they were more concerned about passing away as believers. They said, seeking refuge in Allah Almighty:

The objective of human beings in this world is to attain happiness in the Hereafter.

"...Our Lord! Pour out on us patience and constancy, and take our souls unto Thee as Muslims (who bow to thy will)! (A'râf, 7: 126)

The price they paid for their faith was to have their hands and legs cut off, and they met their Creator as martyrs and as His friends.

Furthermore, the oppressors in the narrative of the *Ashâb-i Ukhdûd*[2] thought that the believers were committing a crime when they declared their faith in Allah; they thus threw them into ditches of fire. But the devoted believers never abandoned their faith, going bravely to their deaths for the sake of their belief in Allah Almighty. Indeed, those who truly fear Allah do not fear anything else.

Habîb-i Najjâr of the *Ashâb-i Qaria*[3] was stoned to death because of his faith. But while the curtains of this world were closing for him at his final breath, the windows of the afterlife opened and he

2. *Ashâb-i Ukhdûd*, "The People of the Cave", are spoken of in Chapter 18 of the Qur'ân.
3. *Ashâb-i Qaria:* "The People of the Village", are spoken of in Chapter 36 of the Qur'ân.

was shown the divine pleasures he had earned. Grieved by the blindness of his people, he said:

"...Would that my people knew!" (Yâsîn, 36: 26)

Eternal happiness in the Hereafter was bestowed upon him as a result of his stoning to death in this temporal world.

In the early periods of Christianity, the Romans, in alliance with the Greeks and idolaters, led the believers to their deaths at the cruel mercy of savage lions. The faithful were not thinking about living while they in the grip of the lions; rather they were struggling to keep their faith. They endured this severe persecution because they had chosen the reward of Allah the Merciful.

Without a doubt, these are all rewards for those who are conscious of being always with Allah Almighty. Thus being with Allah the Merciful is the peak of servitude and an essential part of it.

It is reported that once, Shaykh Shibli was sitting in a congregation where

a preacher was giving a sermon on the Day of Judgment. Towards the end of the sermon the preacher spoke about the questions which will be asked to those in the grave:

"Where did you use your knowledge? Where did you spend your wealth? Did you perform your prayers? Were you heedful of what was permitted (*halâl*) and what was forbidden (*harâm*)?"

The preacher continued with similar questions. So many peripheral issues were mentioned that Shaykh Shibli, in order to bring attention back to the main point, called out to the imâm: "O imâm! Allah Almighty will not ask that many questions. He will, however, ask, "O My servant! I was with you, who were you with?"

Thus, we see that at the heart of what how we conduct ourselves is the constant awareness that we are with the Almighty and then, as a result, not waste the limited breaths that have been afforded to us. This is explained in the following beautiful lines of poetry:

"Humans are asleep
and when they die they
wake up."
-Imâm 'Alî-

It has been wasted, we now understand

The one hour which we spent without you...

The Prophet Muhammad (May Allah bless him and grant him peace) once took hold of 'Abdullah ibn 'Umar's shoulders and said:

"*Be in this world as if you are a stranger or a traveler.*" (Bukhârî, *Riqaq*, no. 5)

It was with these thoughts that 'Abdullâh ibn 'Umar (May Allah be pleased with both of them) always gave the following advice in his sermons:

"*If you survive till the evening, do not expect to be alive in the morning, and if you survive till the morning, do not expect to be alive in the evening, and take (precaution or preparations) from your health for your sickness, and (take) from your life for your death*" (Bukhârî, *Riqaq*, no. 3)

These words, which express the temporality of life, direct us to the true life.

In fact, the Messenger of Allah (May Allah bless him and give him peace) expressed the same sentiments in one of his prayers: *"O Allah! There is no life worth living except the life of the Hereafter..."* (Bukhârî, *Riqaq*, no. 2)

The lives of the Companions, who understood this reality in the best manner, are full of examples of virtue and wisdom. Khubayb (May Allah be pleased with him) had only one wish before being martyred: to send his affectionate greetings to the Prophet of Allah (May Allah bless him and grant him peace). With sadness he turned his eyes to the skies and, seeking refuge in Allah, said:

"O Allah, there is no one here to take my greetings to the Messenger of Allah (May Allah bless him and grant him peace), please take my greetings to him!" At that moment the Prophet Muhammad who was sitting in Medina with his Companions said: "*Wa 'alayhissalâm*" (greetings be upon him also). Upon hearing this the Companions, surprised by what they heard, asked the Prophet: "O Messenger of Allah, whose greetings

did you reply to?" "To your brother Khubayb's greetings,"[4] he responded. The Prophet Muhammad (May Allah bless him and grant him peace) described Khubayb as the most noble of martyrs saying, "He is my neighbor in heaven."

Another example of this kind of love and enthusiasm is when, at the end of the Battle of 'Uhud, the Prophet Muhammad (May Allah bless him and grant him peace) gave orders that all the wounded and martyrs be accounted for, but he was particularly concerned about Sa'd ibn al-Rabî' (May Allah be pleased with him). The Prophet Muhammad (May Allah bless him and grant him peace) sent one of his Companions to the battleground to see if there was any news of him. The Companion called out and looked everywhere, but could not find Sa'd (May Allah be pleased with him). Finally, without much hope, he shouted towards the wounded and martyrs: "O Sa'd, the Prophet has sent me. He has asked me to find out if you are among the living or the martyrs." Hearing that the Prophet was

4. See, Bukhârî, *Maghâzî*, 10; Wâqidî, *Maghâzi*, 280-81

concerned about him, Sa'd (May Allah be pleased with him) mustered all his strength and said in a weak voice: "*I am now among the dead*." It is likely that at that very moment he was witnessing scenes of the Afterlife. The Companion ran over to Sa'd. He had been fatally injured. In a low voice, he uttered the following profound words: "By Allah, if you let any harm befall the Prophet (May Allah bless him and grant him peace) while your eyes still have the strength to move, you will have no excuse before Allah."[5] These words of Sa'd ibn al-Rabî' much like parting advice to all Muslims, were also his words of farewell to the mortal world.

The following report by Huzayfa (May Allah be pleased with him) is significant since it reflects the grace and sublime morals of the Companions during their final moments:

"It was during the battle of Yarmûk. The intensity of the conflict had been subsided. Some of the Muslims had been wounded by spears and arrows and they

5. See, Ibn 'Abd al-Barr, *Isti'ab*, vol. II, 590

were living their final moments. With what remained of my strength, I began to look for my cousin. After walking among the wounded for a while I found him. He was in a pool of blood, hardly able to speak; he was trying to communicate with his eyes. Showing him the water skin I asked:

'Would you like some water?' It was obvious he did, for his lips had dried up from thirst, but he did not have the strength to answer. It was as if he was trying to tell me of his pain by motioning with his eyes. Just as I was about to give him the water, 'Ikrima's voice was heard from among the wounded: 'Water! Water! Please somebody give me a little water!' Hearing this, my cousin Hârith signaled with his eyes that he wanted me to take the water to 'Ikrima.

Running among the martyrs across the baking sands I reached 'Ikrima. I was about to give him water when we heard the groans of 'Iyâsh. 'Give me a drop of water, for the love of Allah, a drop of water!' On hearing this, 'Ikrima told me to take the water to 'Iyâsh; as Hârith before

him, he did not have the chance to drink any water. By the time I had run through the martyrs and reached 'Iyâsh, I heard his last words:

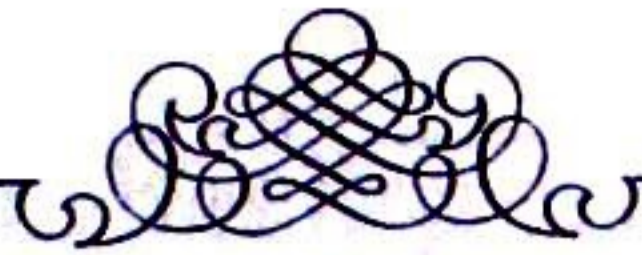
"O Allah, we never abstained from sacrificing our lives in the cause of faith. Give us the honor of martyrdom and forgive our sins!" It was obvious that he had almost attained martyrdom; he had seen the water, but he had had no time to drink it... he had just finished saying the *kalima-i tawhid*.

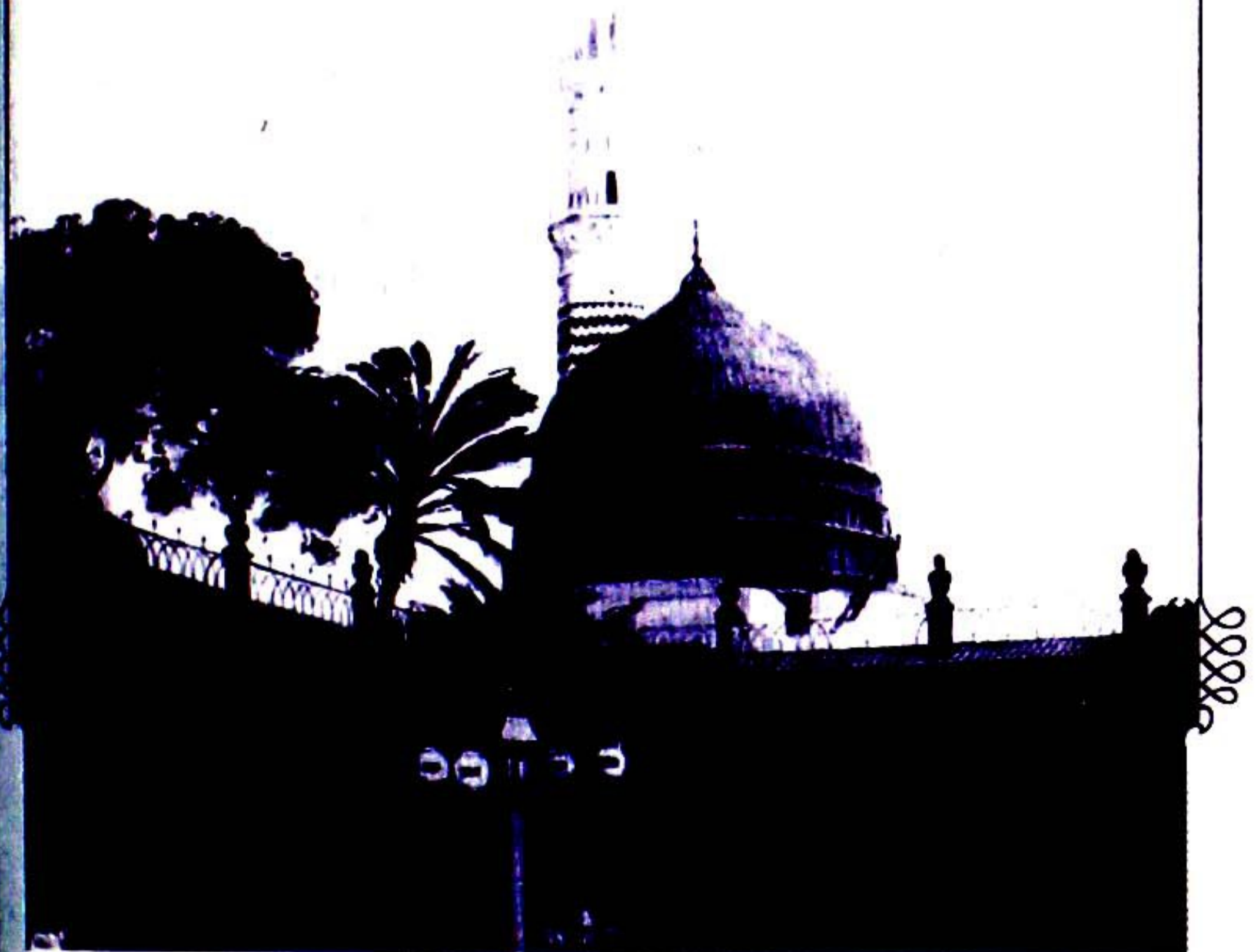
I ran back to 'Ikrima to offer him the water; then I realized that he had also been blessed by martyrdom! I thought that at least I would be able to reach my cousin Hârith. I ran back as fast as I could. But it was in vain, for on the baking sand he had already surrendered his soul... unfortunately, the water skin was still full despite the thirst of these three martyrs."[6]

Huzayfa (May Allah be pleased with him) explains his spiritual state at the time:

6. See, Hâkim, *al-Mustadrak*, vol. III, 270.

"I have seen many incidents during my lifetime, but I have never been as moved or inspired as I was then. Even though there were no family ties between these men, the altruism, thoughtfulness and affection they extended to one another raised my admiration for them and left deep traces in my memory..."

May Allah Almighty bless us also with a death which takes place in a state of belief and with pronouncing the *kalima-i tawhid* and may our last breath be the beginning of our eternal reunion with the Beloved. Âmîn.

Remembering Allah

The Prophet Muhammad left behind him a lifetime of sublime memories borne out of his love and compassion for Allah, and migrated from this mortal world to the world of Truth.

Remembering Allah

In order to leave this world as righteous believers, we must prepare our limited breaths in this temporal world for our last breath. For our happiness in the Hereafter it is essential to spend our lives in this world performing good deeds, showing kindness, and following the straight path of Islâm. As is stated in the following hadîth:

"*A man dies in accordance with the state he lived in and he is resurrected in accordance with the state he died in.*" (Munâwî, *Fayd al-Qadîr sharh Jâmi' al-Saghîr*, vol. V, 663)

The ultimate goal is to take the final step towards Allah Almighty with peace and awareness, and to feel contentment and happiness at the moment we breathe our last; there will certainly be those who at the last moments of their lives will be experiencing nothing less than a nightmare.

Our goal is also to be in a position to say happily, “I am coming to you my Lord!” May Allah grant us the ability to be able to say these words, Âmîn!

Whatever the soul is occupied with in this world, it will continue to be engaged with at the time of death. Of course there are exceptions: Even though a believer spends their life doing good deeds in order to finally pass away in a state of belief, they should never take for granted that they will attain the mercy of Allah. Similarly, a person who has sinned and lived a contemptible life should not lose hope in the grace of Allah Almighty. This is since the way in which we expend our final breath is a divine secret.

In the Qur'ân there are many examples of those who struggled at the time of death to protect their faith as well as those who, while living a righteous life, chose to be captives of their desires and consequently fell into blasphemy.

There are the knowledgeable ones who, instead of adorning their knowledge with enlightenment, chose to follow their

desires: examples are Shaytân, Qârûn, Bal'am bin Bawra and the Companion of the Prophet, Salâba, all of whom were deceived by the intrigues of this world.

As each of us knows, Shaytân was once highly esteemed by Allah Almighty. But due to his pride he was unable to see the magnificence, power, and glory of the Divine Imperative and, as a result, he claimed that he was superior to Âdam. Deluded by the thought that he was both favored and honored, he opposed the command of Allah. Eventually, due to his pride and stubbornness, Shaytân was subjected to eternal estrangement.

Qârûn was once a poor but righteous person. After the Prophet Mûsâ (upon him be peace), he was the greatest exegete of the Torah. He was gifted with the secret of alchemy as a result of a prayer by Mûsâ, but later was overcome by his desires and his heart inclined to worldly pleasures. He became so wealthy that even men of great strength were unable to carry the keys to his treasure. He was ensnared by his caprice and affluence such that when

the Prophet Mûsâ (upon him be peace) ordered him to pay his alms, Qârûn had the audacity to ask: "Are you after the wealth which *I* have earned?" Indeed, it was his wealth that was the cause of his impertinence and destruction.

Qârûn was also jealous of the spiritual states reached by Mûsâ and Hârûn (upon them be peace). His resentment and envy was so excessive that he attempted to defame Mûsâ by accusing him of indecency. As a result, Qârûn was buried together with his wealth which he had been so proud of. Forgetting who the true owner of wealth is and falling in love with worldly possessions and ranks are the most grievous kinds of heedlessness.

Bal'am bin Bawra was a pious servant and a miracle worker who was granted knowledge of the most-powerful name of Allah, *Ism-i Azam*. He was known among the Israelites as a saint and a scholar. But Bal'am bin Bawra later squandered his spiritual state by becoming a slave to his carnal passions. This incident is reported in the Qur'ân:

To be able to face death with such grace a person must first destroy his self and passions. He must live his life in accordance with the Divine Imperative and be prepared to breathe his last.

"Relate to them the story of the man to whom We sent Our Signs, but he passed them by: So Satan followed him up, and he went astray. If it had been Our will, We should have elevated him with Our Signs: but he Inclined to the earth, and followed his own vain desires. His similitude is that of a dog: if you attack him, he lolls out his tongue, or if you leave him alone, he (still) lolls out his tongue. That is the similitude of those who reject Our Signs; so relate the story perchance they may reflect." (A'râf, 7: 175-176)

Another example of one who, while living a life of excellence, was deceived and destroyed by worldly passions and who exchanged eternal happiness for eternal misery was Salâba. He would spend his time in the mosque and with the Prophet listening to his sermons to begin with but when he became affluent Salâba's affection for worldly possessions grew and in time he abandoned the community. Refraining from his duty of giving alms, he was subjected to a pitiful end. Later, he regretted not listening to the words of the

Prophet Muhammad; when he eventually realized that his time had elapsed, he tried in vain to attain the forgiveness of the Messenger of Allah. In his last moments the words of the Prophet echoed in his ears: "O, Salâba, for you to be grateful for a little wealth is much better than you possessing great wealth for which you are not."[7]

An example from the life of Sufyân al-Thawrî, one of the greatest figures in the history of Islamic Law and Sufism, is worthy of mention. Sufyân looked much older than his age. He would tell those who asked the reason for this: "I had a teacher who was educating me. While he breathed his last he could not say the *kalima-i tawhid*, even though I exhorted him to do so. Seeing this has aged me."

When death will come to us is a matter concealed. Like Pharaoh's sorcerers, there are those who will be guided unto the right path at the end of their lives; then there are those who have lived pious

7. See, Tabarî, *Tafsîr*, XIV, 370-72; Ibn Kathîr, *Tafsîr*, II, 388.

lives but close the final chapter of life in disappointment and frustration, such as Qârûn and Bal'am bin Bawra. Therefore, however high the spiritual state, rank and superiority of a servant may be, the self (*nafs*) and Shaytân are at all times waiting for the right moment to attack. No sooner than they find a chance, they attempt to cause the servant's feet to slip from the Straight Path. Shaytân, as stated in the Qur'ân, said to Allah Almighty:

"Because thou hast thrown me out (of the Way), lo! I will lie in wait for them on thy straight way." (A'râf, 7: 16)

He asked to be granted respite until the Day of Resurrection. Allah Almighty granted this time to Shaytân. Shaytân swore that only the sincere believers would escape his attacks:

"Except thy servants amongst them, sincere and purified (by thy grace)." (Sâd, 38: 83)

No human being is safe from the danger of losing his faith unless he is a prophet. This is why all believers must make a resolute effort to make the best

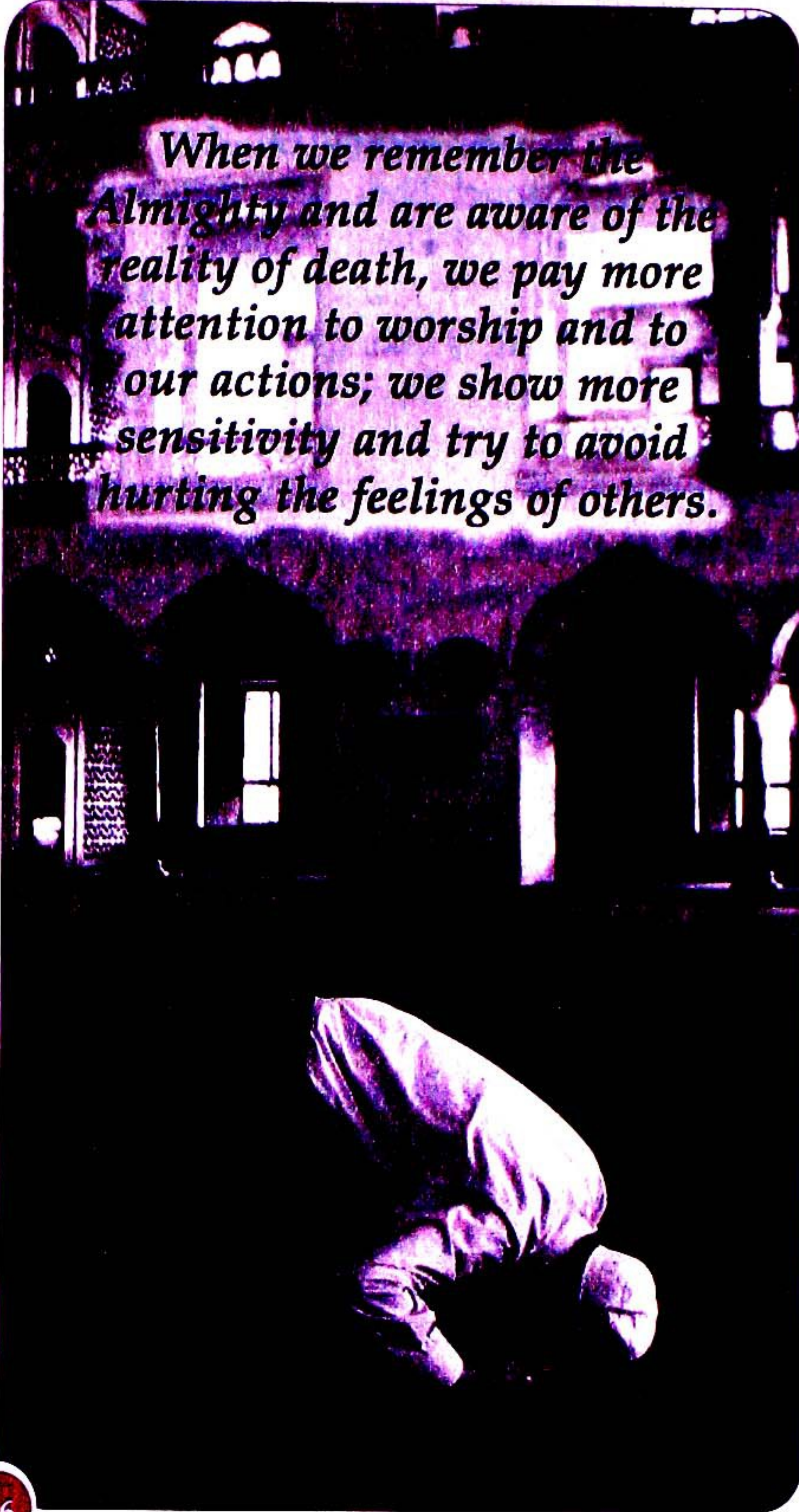
use of the blessings given to them. The only way to be saved from the terrors of death is to endeavor to live a pious life. Those who are prepared for death will see death as an opportunity to be united with the Beloved rather than something terrifying. These are the blessed believers who have attained peace in death. Those who spend their lives in blindness and destroy their lives in the Hereafter can never be rescued from the torment of the horrific, dark turbulence of death.

How beautifully Rûmî explains this: "*O Son! Everyone's death is of the same quality as himself: Death is an enemy for those who hate the thought of death without contemplating that it unites the servant with Allah, and who see death as an enemy, yet it is a friend for those who see death as a friend.*

O Soul who runs away from death! In fact your fear of death in fleeing from it is really your fear of yourself.

Because what you see in the mirror of death is your own ugly face, not the visage of death. Your spirit is like a tree,

and death is like a leaf. Every leaf is of the genus of its tree"

If a servant can surpass himself, if he can internalize the divine attributes in his heart, if he can attain the secret of "dying before the arrival of death", then death will be seen as the first mandatory step towards an eternal life with the Supreme and Almighty Lord. So death, which is a cause for deep fright for many, turns into the excitement of meeting with *Rafîq-i A'lâ*, the Supreme Companion.

The final moments of the Prophet Muhammad (May Allah bless him and grant him peace) were times of the greatest excitement in which he looked forward to communion with the Beloved. Since he (May Allah bless him and grant him peace) lived all his life in obedience to the orders of his Lord, his days before his death were as a *Shab-i Arus* or wedding night. According to a report from Â'isha and 'Alî (May Allah be pleased with both of them), every day for the last three days before the Prophet's (May Allah bless him and grant him peace) death, Allah Almighty

had sent Archangel Jibrîl to the Prophet Muhammad to ask about him. On the final day, Archangel Jibrîl, who was with Azrâ'îl the Angel of Death, came to the Prophet and said: "O, Messenger of Allah, the Angel of Death is asking permission to enter. He has never asked for permission to enter from any other son of Âdam! And he will never ask permission to enter from any son of Âdam after you! Please grant him your permission!"

The Angel of Death went in, stood in front of the Prophet Muhammad and said: "O, Messenger of Allah! Allah Almighty has sent me to you and ordered me to obey all of your orders! If you wish, I will take your soul! If you wish, I will leave your soul!" The Prophet Muhammad asked: "O, Angel of Death! Would you really do this?" Azrâ'îl replied: "I have been ordered to obey every one of your commands." Archangel Gabriel then said: "O Ahmed! Allah Almighty misses you!" The Prophet replied: "Everything with Allah is more favorable and more enduring. O Angel of Death, do what you have been ordered to do, take my soul!"

When we remember the Almighty and are aware of the reality of death, we pay more attention to worship and to our actions; we show more sensitivity and try to avoid hurting the feelings of others.

The Prophet Muhammad put his hand in the water at his side and wiped his face. He then said "*Lâ illâha illallâh*! (I bear witness that there is no God but Allah) Truly, death has its own agony!" After this, the Prophet Muhammad held his hands up, looked up towards the ceiling and said: "O Allah! *Rafîq-i A'lâ, Rafîq-i A'lâ* (the Most Supreme Companion, the Most Supreme Companion)."

The Prophet Muhammad left behind him a lifetime of sublime memories borne out of his love and compassion for Allah, and migrated from this mortal world to the world of Truth.[8]

The final moments and the excitement of Mawlânâ Jalâl al-Dîn Rûmî to be united with his Beloved after living a life of prosperity was reported by his student Husâmaddîn Chelebî:

'One day Shaykh Sadreddîn and a number of his disciples came to visit Mawlânâ at his deathbed. They were saddened when they saw that Mawlânâ's

8. See Ibn Sa'd, *Tabaqât*, II, 229, 259; Balazûrî, *Ansâb al-Ashrâf*, I, 565; Ahmad b. Hanbal, *Musnad*, VI, 89.

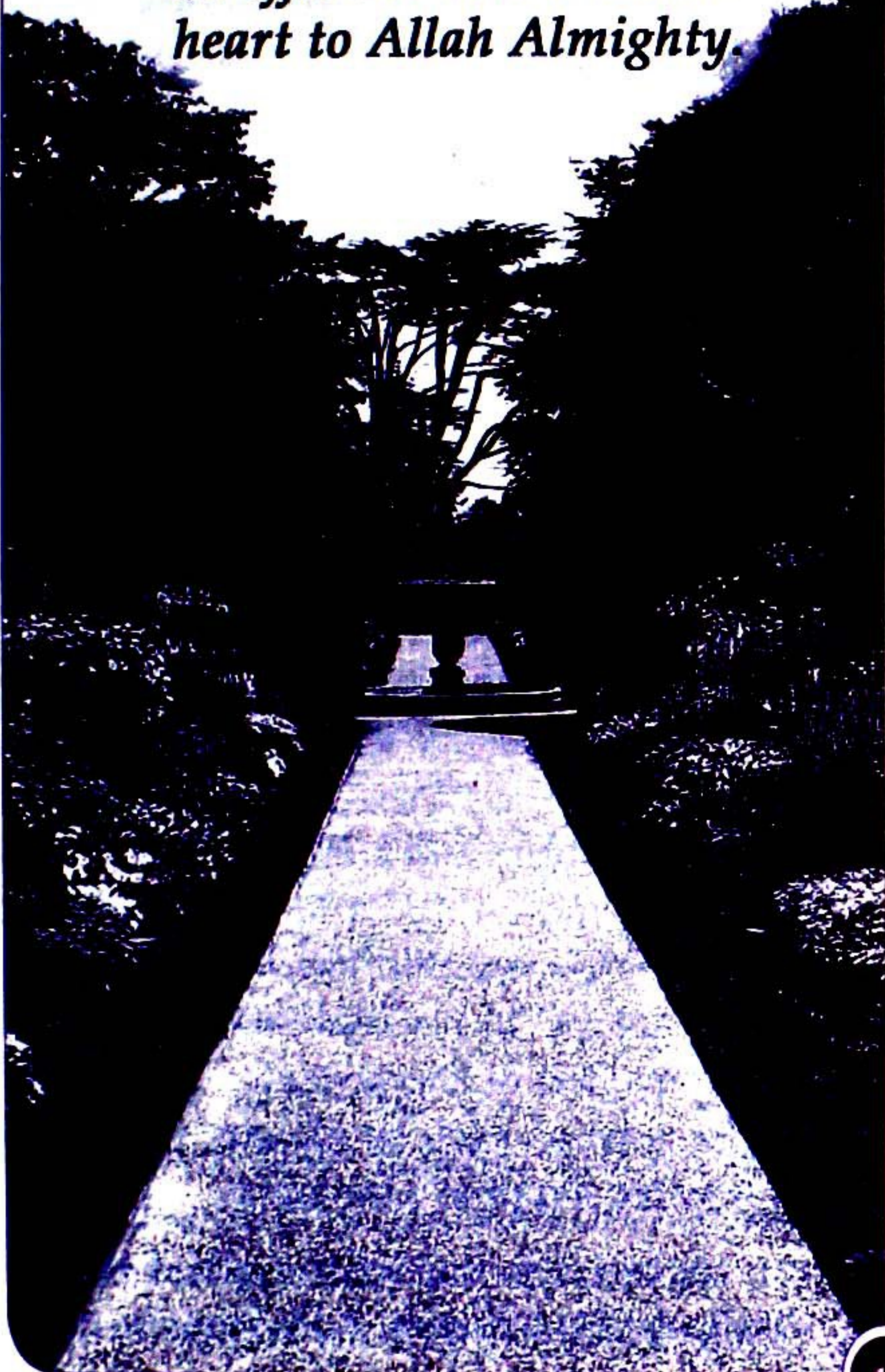
condition was bad. Shaykh Sadreddîn said: "May Allah help you to recover quickly! I hope you will soon be completely well." Upon hearing this, Mawlânâ said: "May you be blessed with health! There is just a short distance left between the lover and the Beloved; would you not prefer this distance to be removed so that light may reunite with Light?"[9]

Unlike most people, Rûmî never perceived death as something to fear; on the contrary, he saw death as something which rescues one from a foreign land. He considered death to be a reunion with the One of Eternal Goodness, Allah Almighty. In one of his works, Rûmî explains his attitude to death:

"*Do not call me dead when I die because I was already dead. I have been resurrected with death; a companion has come and taken me...*"

This is why Rûmî called the moment of his departure from this world "*Shab-i Arûs*" (the wedding night).

9. See Ebu'l Hasan en-Nedevi, İslam Önderleri Tarihi, vol. I, 449

In perfect servitude every human being should make an effort to take a sound heart to Allah Almighty.

To be able to face death with such grace a person must first destroy his self and passions. He must live his life in accordance with the Divine Imperative and be prepared to breathe his last. Allah Almighty states:

"*And worship thy Lord until there come unto thee certainty.*" (Hijr, 15: 99)

This summarizes the principle of all the lives of the Companions of Allah!

Every wise and adoring soul should maintain the life that has been entrusted to it on the Straight Path and embellish it with worship and adoration. In perfect servitude every human being should make an effort to take a sound heart to Allah Almighty. The Prophet Muhammad's (May Allah bless him and grant him peace) saying "*Rafîq-i A'lâ, Rafîq-i A'lâ* (the Most Supreme Companion, the Most Supreme Companion)" in his final moments was a manifestation of his servitude; it continues to be seen as such by all wise ones who follow the Prophet's footsteps.

In fact, the state of our grand sheikh, Maḥmûd Sâmî Efendi, in his final moments

is a very good example for us. He made every effort to live his life according to the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad (May Allah bless him and grant him peace).

Mahmûd Sâmî Efendi was a pious servant of Allah Almighty and his heart was full of love for the Prophet Muhammad (May Allah bless him and grant him peace).

Like the one trying to follow footsteps left in the snow by one who has preceded, Mahmûd Sâmî Efendi spent his life following the footsteps of the Prophet Muhammad.

The greatest manifestation of this is the fact that he surrendered his soul at the time of night prayer (*tahajjud*) at a place close to the grave of the Prophet Muhammad, whom he had followed with love and commitment.

Those who were beside him at the time of his death reported that the only thing that he could be heard uttering was "*Allah, Allah, Allah*". In fact, it was not just his tongue uttering this. His soul and

every cell in his body affirmed the presence of Allah.

In short, the objective is to be to live and surrender as a righteous servant; this is what Allah Almighty requires of us. We should follow the life of the Prophet and be kind, thoughtful and gentle human beings. If we wish to achieve the rank of 'excellent slave!'(Sa'd 38: 30), we must realize it is only possible through loving Allah Almighty.

Being blessed with spiritual affection is realized by purifying the heart from all filth and consequently having the heart ready for the light of the sun of truth. As a result of this spiritual state, every moment of our breathing lives will hopefully be a preparation for the final breath we will take.

On the other hand, spiritual damage and loss is incurred by forgetting Allah the Merciful. The Almighty says in the Qur'ân:

"And be ye not like those who forgot Allah so He made them forget themselves! Such are the rebellious transgressors!." (Hashr, 59: 19)

Indeed, we commit sins and do evil deeds when we forget Allah. When we remember the Almighty and are aware of the reality of death, we pay more attention to worship and to our actions; we show more sensitivity and try to avoid hurting the feelings of others. That is why we must never harm anybody with either our behavior or with our tongue.

How well Yunus Emre expressed this level of courtesy in the following poem:

The soul is the throne of the Divine

The Divine glanced at the soul

Unhappy he will be in both abodes

Whoever breaks a heart

Allah Almighty has warned us in many verses of the Qur'ân about our actions, desires and our conduct, showing us the way to avoid having our lives ending in sorrow.

"O ye who believe! Fear Allah as He should be feared, and die not except in a state of Islâm." (Âl 'Imrân, 3: 102)

The point is to live in accordance

with the injunctions of the Qur'ân. If we live any other way, it will be of no consequence whether we have a long or a short life. All creatures will confront the reality mentioned in the following divine statement:

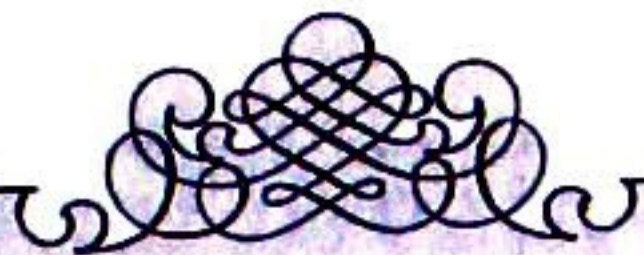
"The Day they see it, (It will be) as if they had tarried but a single evening, or (at most till) the following morn!" (Nâzi'ât, 79: 46)

All we need to do is to pray in the evening and in the mid-morning, worship and show obedience.

Junayd-i Baghdâdî warned us with the following words of advice:

"An Hour on earth is more valuable than a thousand years in the Hereafter because in the Hereafter there are no deeds for us to do to attain salvation"

O Allah! Grant us a prosperous life enabling us to breathe our last in a state of love and devotion and thus unite with Your Divine Presence!

Âmîn!

The Final Breath - An Untarnished Mirror

The last breath is like a clear polished mirror. Man will only be sure of his rank at the moment of his final exhalation; then his life`s account will be displayed before his eyes and his heart.

The Final Breath-
An Untarnished Mirror

The last breath is like a clear polished mirror. Man will only be sure of his rank at the moment of his final exhalation; then his life's account will be displayed before his eyes and his heart. It is for this reason that there is no better preparation for the time of death than the contemplation of death itself.

As mentioned in the Qur'ân, the Pharaoh spent his life rebelling against Allah and only realized the true meaning of his life when he confronted his fate at the Red Sea. He came to understand the reality of his selfish reign as nothing more than the cause of his own misery and sorrow. When he breathed his last, he did so full of regret:

"We took the Children of Israel across the sea: Pharaoh and his hosts followed them in insolence and spite.

At length, when overwhelmed with the flood, he said: "I believe that there is no god except Him in Whom the Children of Israel believe: I am of those who submit (to Allah in Islâm)." (Yûnus, 10: 90)

But it was too late. Allah Almighty said to the Pharaoh, who had only been inclined to testify his faith while drowning in the Red Sea:

"Ah now! But a little while before wast thou in rebellion! And thou didst mischief (and violence)" (Yûnus, 10: 91)

Therefore, waking up from a state of slumber, feeling regret and desiring to embrace belief when one is breathing their last is nothing but devastation for those who are in the habit of this when in moments of trouble but then rescinding again when in safety. When the truth confronts us, failing to hear the profound but silent scream of death when we are so engrossed in the daily concerns of our lives, forgetting that one day we too will pass through the door of death, is such a very sad state of heedlessness. We should all be prepared for the surprises

and the turbulence of life. Living without considering death is a sorrowful blindness; without a doubt, we will all pass through the curtain of death one day.

In many verses of the Qur'ân, Allah the Merciful states that the world was created as a place of trial for humans:

"Every soul shall have a taste of death: And We test you by evil and by good by way of trial. To Us must ye return." (Anbiyâ, 21: 35)

"He who created death and life, that He may try which of you is best in deed..." (Mulk, 67: 2)

Every breath we inhale and exhale in this life during our worship, transactions and daily conduct is an indication of how we shall breath our last.

Imâm Ghazâlî says:

"Those who never attained the pleasure of knowledge in this world will not attain the pleasure of contemplation of the Divine essence in the Hereafter; a person cannot own anything in the

Hereafter that they have not earned in this world. Everybody will reap in the Hereafter whatever he has planted in this world; everyone will die as they lived and rise as they died. The extent of the reward of blessing in the Hereafter depends on the extent of knowledge we gained in this world or how much we are aware of the Almighty and perform our duties."

Therefore, with each breath we are actually preparing ourselves either for divine punishment or reward. Allah Almighty warns us in the Qur'ân:

"O ye who believe! Save yourselves and your families from a fire whose fuel is men and stones..." (Tahrîm, 66: 6)

"When the Blazing Fire is kindled to a fierce heat; And when the Garden is brought near; (Then) shall each soul know what it has put forward." (Takwîr, 81: 12-14)

"Then whither go ye?" (Takwîr, 81: 26)

In this respect, every human being must examine his conduct and be careful in his preparations. He must live with

awareness throughout his life before death arrives. Profit and loss, gain and decrease each has its place in this world. In the grave, there will only be reckoning.

It is certain that those who have been deceived by their carnal and temporal desires on this earth and who, consequently, have weakened their spirituality, will be afflicted with contempt and frustration in their graves. Moreover, it is unknown how much longer our time in the grave will be compared with the time we spend on Earth. So the main duty of every right minded person is to prepare for a long life in the grave and for eternal life in the Hereafter.

On the other hand, the dark face of death, brightened by the lights of a believing heart, can be transformed from being a terrifying moment into glad tidings of eternal revival. A graveyard full of friends and family members is not a world of darkness, but it is a place of warning and guidance. For a conscious believer, life and death are natural realities which live side by side. A true believer is at peace

with death because he has prepared for it; his soul is ever tranquil. In short, making our last breath the most beautiful moment of our lives depends on if we have a heart full of love and affection for Allah the Merciful. Otherwise, a life full of "Affection for the world and loathing of death" will end in misery.

It is possible to describe the ideal preparation for the Hereafter as an adornment of the self with "attributes of perfection", such as compassion, kindness, responsibility, forgiveness, self-sacrifice, devotion, benevolence and patience, all of which are mentioned in the Qur'ân. Embracing all of these attributes of goodness and being among the servants loved by Allah is the result of true belief. Belief and devotion should be a Muslim's main goal. On the other hand, we should avoid evil qualities such as pride, arrogance, profligacy, oppression, sedition, backbiting, gossip, slander and lying. Since these and their like are disliked by Allah, abstaining from them is an important part of our preparation for the Hereafter.

The main duty of every right minded person is to prepare for a long life in the grave and for eternal life in the Hereafter.

In order to breathe one's last in faith, the believer must first refine and purify his soul from vile tendencies and then adorn it with characteristics of perfection. This is because the establishment of piety in the heart is the most valuable guide on the journey of life.

The following statement of Imâm Jalâluddîn Rûmî in some way explains this side of purification:

"*Building a grave is done neither with stone, with wood nor with felt. It is essential to dig a grave for yourself in a pure heart, and in your own abode of cleanliness. And in order to do that, you must be rid of self assertion and selfishness in the presence of Allah Almighty.*"

For the refinement of the soul and the attainment of the desired states of heart, it is necessary to be filled with affection for Allah and His Messenger. The greatest sign of affection for Allah is obedience. Rebelling against Allah whilst claiming to have affection is nothing more than self-delusion.

Allah Almighty says:

"Say: If it be that your fathers, your sons, your brothers, your mates, or your kindred, the wealth that ye have gained, the commerce in which ye fear a decline or the dwellings in which ye delight – are dearer to you than Allah or His Messenger, or the striving in His cause; then wait until Allah brings about His decision: and Allah guides not the rebellious." (Tawba, 9: 24)

Hence, we should hold the love of Allah Almighty and His Messenger and devotion to them above all else; we must also be dutiful in protecting this state until our appointed terms. Achieving higher levels of love for Allah can be realized through performing our duties and worship. There is a great difference between the servitude of a soul that is caught up in worldly passions and away from divine love and the servitude of a soul full of devotion and divine love. Noble deeds, good manners, service for other human beings, acts of worship and the obedience of a believer whose heart is full of true affection for

Allah and the Prophet (May Allah bless him and grant him peace) all bring him closer to the level of excellence. Another consideration a believer needs to pay close attention to in preparing for the moment of death is the performance of duties and worship with reverence. Allah the Merciful specifies the qualities of those believers who have attained salvation:

"*Successful indeed are the believers, those who humble themselves in their prayers.*" (Mu'minûn, 23: 1-2)

As for those who pray in heedlessness, it is said in the Qur'ân:

"*Woe to the worshippers, those who are neglectful of their prayers.*" (Mâ'ûn, 107: 4-5)

Allah Almighty wants the believers to perform acts of worship with their hearts and bodies in complete harmony, this being a step towards eternal union with Allah. Without a doubt, this divine desire constitutes the basis not only for prayer but also for all other forms of worship such as pilgrimage, fasting, and alms giving.

The light of happiness in the Hereafter is hidden in the darkness of dawn.

In this regard, fasting teaches us to appreciate the blessings that have been bestowed upon us, it brings our hearts closer to those who are in difficult positions and it embellishes our hearts with empathy for those who are less fortunate than us. At the same time, by preventing us from the normally permitted blessings, fasting helps us to avoid unlawful and doubtful things at other times. Hajj is a form of worship in which we don the shroud of the dead, reminding ourselves of our insignificance in the presence of the Divine Majesty. A believer who gives charity must be aware that the true owner of wealth is Allah the Merciful, and that he is just a custodian of that wealth. Moreover, how can a believer who gives charity be envious of the wealth of other people? Yet, the level of consciousness in servitude, the basis of all worship, is only in proportion to the strength of faith and affection in the soul. When the soul has been cleansed of all impurities, the acts of worship attain their true consistency and there then shines the light of Truth.

We learn from the exemplary life of the Prophet Muhammad (May Allah bless

him and grant him peace) and from the ways of his Companions how to perform acts of worship with the due reverence they deserves. The Prophet at no point considered his life detached from the Hereafter; he constantly drew attention to the importance of performing an act of worship as if it is the last.

One of the Companions came to Prophet Muhammad (May Allah bless him and grant him peace) and said: "O Messenger of Allah! Please give me some advice which is concise and reaches the heart of the matter!" The Prophet Muhammad answered: "When you pray, pray as if you are leaving this world and it is your last prayer! Do not say anything that you will have to apologize for! Do be desirous for the possessions of others!" (Ibn-i Mâjah, *Zuhd*, 15; Ahmed bin Hanbal, *Musnad*, V, 412)

Being believers who strive throughout their lives to prepare for death, we need to beautify our manners and transactions with the guidelines from the life of the Prophet Muhammad just as we do in our acts of worship. We should strive to be a

Muslim whose thoughts and actions can benefit the community; whatever we want for ourselves we should also want for our Muslim brothers and sisters. As a result, our affection for Allah and His Messenger should gush forth from our hearts and embrace all living creatures.

Another valuable point to consider when preparing for death is to internalize the state of *ihsân* in our hearts. That is, remembering Allah Almighty in our hearts as if we are under divine observation at all times. The greatest joy for a believer is the thought of being united with the Beloved, but those whose minds are not synchronized with their hearts and are defeated by carnal desires are incapable of comprehending that joy. In other words, they are unaware of the ultimate happiness.

Believers must put their trust in Allah and be patient. They should never lose moderation or balance which may be shaken by the traumas of life. They must remember the intense trials that the Prophet Muhammad (May Allah bless him and grant him peace) was made to

face. Even though he lost five of his six children, without showing overwhelming grief or spiritual imbalance he accepted his fate. Neither should we forget the patience and strength he displayed when his uncle Hamza (May Allah be pleased with him) and his beloved companion Mus'ab (May Allah be pleased with him) were martyred.

Every human being in this mortal world must learn to control their actions with patience. All travelers of the path of spirituality must treat forgetfulness with remembrance, ungratefulness with gratitude, rebellion with obedience, miserliness with generosity, selfishness with altruism, doubt with knowledge, hypocrisy with sincerity and humility, sedition with repentance and heedlessness with contemplation.

Holy days and nights and, particularly, dawn times enlivened by remembrance are other opportunities to draw spiritually closer to the Almighty. The light of happiness in the Hereafter is hidden in the darkness of dawn. All the friends of

the Truth who lived a life combining the temporal world and Hereafter sought the pleasure of Allah Almighty with affection and fear at dawn. Those who adore Allah the Merciful considered any dawn passed without remembrance as hours of separation from the Him.

Another important aspect is charity spent in the way of Allah. As in the following verse:

"And spend of your substance in the cause of Allah, and make not your own hands contribute to (your) destruction..." (Baqarah, 2: 195)

Islamic exegetes interpret the danger in this verse as being a "negligence to serve religion and to elevate the voice of Truth, and to stay away from charity and sacrifice due to fear of destitution and love for the world." Therefore, a believer must always make the effort to spend their wealth and their lives on the path of the Almighty. This is since, just like this mortal life, all our belongings are also worldly possessions that have been entrusted to us. Spending these trusts for just causes

will bring us benefit eternally, whereas miserliness or withholding due to carnal desires will lead to frustration and loss in the Hereafter.

The believer should always remember the following warning regarding charity: When the body of the dead is lowered down into the grave before the insects reach the body, condolences of his family and close relatives end. As the heirs begin to divide inheritance, the earth begins to eat away at the body. These two events continue and end together.

On the one hand, the body is being consumed; on the other, the wealth of the deceased is being divided among the relatives. Observing this in surprise, the soul regrets many actions it did in the world, but in vain. Only belief and good deeds will be our real wealth in the Hereafter. The Prophet Muhammad (May Allah bless him and grant him peace) said:

"*(Depending on the actions in the world) the grave will either be one of the gardens of Paradise or one of the pits of Hell.*" (Tirmidhî, *Qiyâmah*, 26)

In short, the condition of our lives in the grave, which will last until the Day of Judgment, will be determined by our actions and deeds in this world.

If a servant stands firm on the direction of the *qiblah,* regardless of their occupation, Allah Almighty will bestow upon him the blessing of being able to find the *qiblah* during his last moments in the world. What is meant by the *qiblah* here is a life that is lived in accordance with the guidance of the Qur'ân and the Sunnah, and in devotion to the meaning of the *kalima-i tawhîd.* Those who never lose their attachment to the meaning of *tawhîd* in their daily life, in their familial or social relationships, or in their servitude to Allah, will usually enjoy the serene atmosphere of the *qiblah* when breathing their last.

The important thing in this life is to attain the secret contained in the verse "Guide us to the straight path" (Fâtiha, 1: 6)] and spend our lives on the "straight path" of Islâm. Otherwise there remains the likelihood of ending this life in despair, like a ship that has been misguided, doomed

to be smashed into pieces on the rocks of the dark seas. May Allah Almighty protect us all.

Those who spend their lives as if death is imminent and comprehend the real meaning of "die before you die" are the wise servants and true companions of Allah. It is a divine assurance that they will be at peace, far from the fear and sorrow of Judgment Day.

The mysterious curtain of death which hides the eternal universe of the afterlife is bliss for those who guarded their faith and spent their lives in preparation for their final breaths on Earth.

At the time of death it is our duty to return the soul that Allah has entrusted to us in the same pure and perfect way in which it was given. Just as a poet said:

At that moment curtains open and curtains close;

The merit is to be able to say welcome to Azrael!

(N. Fazil Kisakurek)

The final breath is like a clean, untarnished mirror. Man looks into this mirror, seeing both the beauty and the hideousness of his life. All eyes, ears and limbs will testify against their owners; every curtain will be raised and confessions will leave the mind and the conscience in a state of regret. Let not our final glance into the mirror be one of regret. While time remains, we must make the Qur'ân and the exemplary life of the Prophet (May Allah bless him and grant him peace) a part of our lives. Only the wise truly know themselves before they die.

May Allah make our last breath a window through which we view our rewards in the eternal world! Amîn!

Our every breath consists of an exhalation and an inhalation, each succeeding the other without pause. This process occurs naturally and most often without any consciousness on our part. Every breath is essential to our continuation; with each one our life is prolonged. Yet one day this will stop; at that time, at the moment of our final breath, what will be the state of our hearts?

In this elegantly written book, Ustadh Osman Nuri Topbas provides us with an important reminder of the necessity of preparing for death. Every living creature will die, even the most dogmatic sceptic will concede this. Yet not every creature will have spent its life in preparation for the final moment, for the last breath.